

MELROSE

Woman returns to dream home

■ A widow who sustained a great deal of damage during last year's hurricanes was finally permitted to return to her home, repaired and spruced up by Team Metro.

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Maria Lomana and her husband Mario came to Miami from Cuba 43 years ago on a trip that was called "the last flight of liberty." For a year, they worked and saved every penny they could while living in a tiny apartment. Then they bought a two-bedroom two-bathroom home in the Melrose area, paying \$7,000 in cash for it.

For the next 30 years, the couple enjoyed living in their home, enhancing it by building a mosaic-tiled patio.

Then the hard times began.

First, Mario, Lomana's husband of more than 40 years, died at 79 of cancer.

Then heavy winds and rain from Hurricane Irene in July 2005 struck parts of the area. A huge tree crashed onto Lomana's house and another fell over in her backyard and cracked her septic tank.

With no friends or family to turn to, Lomana prayed for a miracle.

Her prayer was answered.

"We learned of her situation immediately following the storm and got a team of volun-

teers to cut the tree branches and remove the debris from her yard," said Suzanne Salichs, regional coordinator of Team Metro Melrose.

Lomana went to live with a neighbor. After Team Metro made her home habitable again, Lomana returned. But, shortly afterward, she fell in the yard, breaking an arm and injuring her hip. She spent a week in the hospital, underwent rehabilitation and ended up in an assisted-living facility. She returned home in February.

Team Metro Melrose paid a visit shortly after Lomana returned home and found the 89-year-old widow in desperate circumstances. Her home had \$17,000 worth of storm damage.

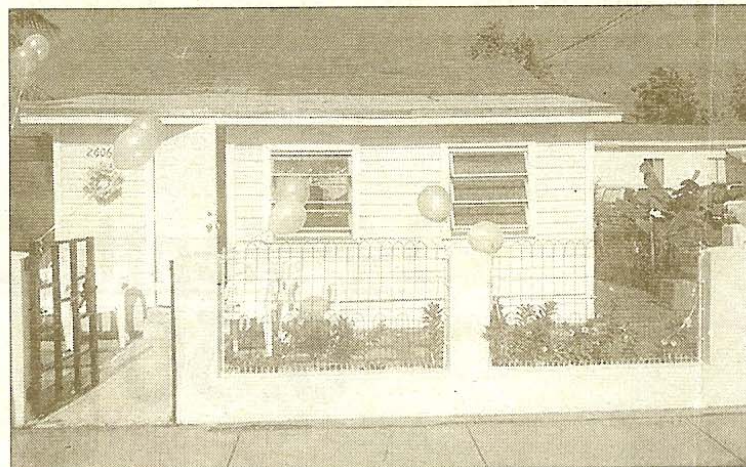
Also, officials began to look into whether Lomana could continue to live by herself or should be placed in the Guardianship Program.

Team Metro picked her as the first beneficiary of its new Senior Housing Assistance Repair Program, (SHARP) which focuses on seniors and handicapped people without homeowner's insurance that sustain storm damage.

Team Metro got a \$20,000 grant from Commercebank to help pay for the repairs to Lomana's home and, in partnership with the county agency, volunteers from the Bunnell Foundation took on



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CUTTING THE RIBBON: Maria Lomana, fourth from left, joins officials for the ceremonial cutting of the ribbon to mark the completion of \$20,000 worth of work on her formerly storm-damaged home, at left. With her, from left, are Sam Walthour, director, Team Metro; Suzanne Salichs, Team Metro Melrose regional coordinator; County Mayor Carlos Alvarez; Richard Bunnell, president, The Bunnell Foundation; Raymundo Barrios, chairman, Melrose Advisory Board; and Melanie Garman, vice president, Commercebank.

the task of sprucing up the property. They painted the exterior and interior, in Lomana's choice of colors. They planted bushes and bought household necessities such as curtains, towels and a table cloth.

Now Team Metro Melrose has decided to expand SHARP to provide repairs for another 12 houses, with help from donors. The need is great, Salichs said. "We are trying to see who is a priority," she said.

"We are looking for private funding to make it a reality."

At a ceremonial opening of Lomana's refurbished home on Aug. 18, county officials welcomed the SHARP initiative.

"This is one very good example about how government can improve quality of life," said Sam Walthour, Team Metro's department director.

County Mayor Carlos Alva-

rez agreed.

"These are the things you do in government that make you feel good," Alvarez said.